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# Gandhāran Sculptures and Buddhism

**Satoshi Naiki**

## SUMMARY

North-west India is famous for its art in ancient times, Gandhāran art, in which the icons of Buddha are thought to have appeared for the first time in the world. The Buddhist culture in the region has attracted the interest of not only people in the East, for the culture is one of the origins of their religious activities, but also that of people in the West, for some believe that the culture appeared under the influence of their ancestor's culture, Hellenism. Scholars also have focused on the ancient culture in north-west India, especially on Gandhāran sculptures, and thanks to their discussions, many aspects of the ancient Buddhist culture have been clarified. However, there is a crucial problem that has long been unsolved. The problem is that the chronology of material cultures in the region has not been constructed. Although many scholars have discussed the culture in the region by analyzing Gandhāran sculptures, none of them know exactly in which period the culture they discussed took shape, for they cannot explain when the sculptures were made. In order to understand the Buddhist culture in north-west India correctly, the consolidation of the chronology of Gandhāran sculptures is needed urgently. The purpose of this book is to construct the chronology of Gandhāran sculptures on the basis of archaeological information obtained from excavations.

The discussion in this book can be divided into two parts. In the first part, the chronology of Gandhāran sculptures is discussed.

In chapter one, the stylistic features of Gandhāran sculptures are analyzed. According to D. Faccenna, sculptures found in the Uddiyāna

region can be divided into three stylistic groups: the drawing group with unsophisticated renderings, the naturalistic group with realistic renderings, and the stereometric group with stereotyped renderings. The drawing group had already appeared in the first half of the first century CE and the stereometric group in the third century CE. Also in the Gandhāra region, sculptures with unsophisticated renderings appeared around the second half of the first century CE, and sculptures with stereotyped renderings started to be made in the first half of the third century CE.

In chapter two, the iconography of Gandhāran sculptures, especially that of reliefs found in Thareli and Mekhasanda in the Gandhāra region is discussed. As a result, it is revealed that the reliefs can be separated into two groups depending on the kind of scenes depicted on them. One is the group mainly composed of scenes depicting the story of Buddha either before enlightenment or after nirvana, or both; the other is the group composed of scenes between enlightenment and nirvana. The former can be assigned to an earlier phase than the latter. The turning point between these two can be assigned to around the second half of the second century CE or the first half of the third century CE.

In chapter three, Gandhāran sculptures are discussed from a technical perspective. In order to connect bodies and arms of standing figures which were made separately, four main techniques were used: 1) the mortise-tenon joint, 2) the metal stick joint, 3) the clamp joint, and 4) the dovetail joint. Most standing figures with connected arms were found from the Gandhāra region. The mortise-tenon joint and the metal stick joint can be assigned to an earlier phase, and the clamp joint and the dovetail joint to a later phase, the latter appearing around the first half of the third century CE.

In chapter four, inscriptions on Gandhāran sculptures are brought into focus. There are four sculptures with inscriptions including dates that

were found in the Gandhāra region: 1) a standing Hārīti statue found at Skārah Dherī with the date “179,” 2) a standing Buddha statue found at Pālātū Dherī with “284,” 3) a “meditating Buddha in Indrasāra cave” sculpture found at Mamāne Dherī with “(2)89,” and 4) a standing Buddha statue found at Loriyan Tangai with “318.” By considering the chronology of the stylistic features of sculptures, it is possible to assign the three Buddha figures to the first half of the third century CE or later, and the Skārah Dherī Hārīti to around or after the second half of the first century CE. By calculating the dates with the Azes era, inaugurated in 47/6 BCE according to a recent study by H. Falk and Ch. Bennett, the inscribed sculptures can be dated to 132/3, 237/8, 242/3, 271/2 CE respectively.

In the second part of this book, other material cultures, such as pottery or types of masonry, are analyzed.

In chapter five, the masonry types used in constructing buildings in the Gandhāra region are discussed. In this region, several masonry types were used: rubble masonry, diaper masonry, semi-ashlar masonry, and so on. Rubble masonry had long been used on buildings mainly until the second half of the first century CE. Around the first half of the second century diaper masonry was adopted, and around the first half of the third century, semi-ashlar masonry appeared in the region. Although the chronological sequence in the Gandhāra region was similar to that in the Taxila region and the Uddiyāna region, there was a difference in the time when each new masonry type was adopted.

In chapter six, a non-Buddhist site, Chanaka Dherī in the Gandhāra region is analyzed. In ancient times, there was a great building, which probably was a detached palace for rulers, and a large water tank, both of which were constructed with massive stones. These buildings were constructed before the second half of the first century CE. Then, around 200 CE, when a huge earthquake occurred, they were completely destroyed and the mound abandoned. After the abandonment of the buildings, less

powerful people started to live on the mound. This mound was used for residence even after the ninth century CE.

The conclusion of this book is as follows.

First, it became apparent that there were similarities and contrasts among regions in north-west India. Although stylistic features, iconography and masonry types were shared among regions, techniques of connecting arms and the timing of adopting new masonry types were not.

Secondly, by analyzing scenes depicted on reliefs, it was revealed that in north-west India what Buddhists sought in their religious activities had changed. On one hand, in the earlier phase, Buddhists who worshipped stupas would aim to relive the life of their great teacher, Buddha. On the other hand, in the later phase, their aim changed to learning the greatness of Buddha, who sometimes preached down his opponents with miraculous powers.

Thirdly, the date when the Gandhāran sculptures changed and the reason why the changes occurred were revealed. Around 200 CE, the Gandhāra region experienced a large earthquake. Buddhist temples were destroyed and Gandhāran sculptures used for the decoration of stupas or shrines in temples were damaged. At that time, north-west India, ruled by Vāsudeva I of the Kushān empire, was flourishing and ample funds were put into reconstruction of Buddhist temples and the reproduction of the Gandhāran sculptures. The walls of buildings in temples were restored with a newly adopted technique: semi-ashlar masonry, and stereotyped renderings were used on newly made sculptures because of the urgent need for new sculptures. New techniques for connecting arms were adopted around the same time in order to make arm joints stronger. The huge earthquake that happened around 200 CE had an important effect on changes of material cultures including Gandhāran sculptures.

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